



NC Outdoor Learning Environment Alliance
www.osr.nc.gov/ole

It's Easy Being Green!

Tips for Environmental Sustainability in Early Childhood Settings

Let's Go Green!

- * **Involve children in environmental sustainable practices.** Include strong environmentally sound procedures whenever possible. For example, include resources about conservation in family handbooks, newsletters and signage around classrooms to help assure that practices are seen as a part of the school's culture, not just a 'wish'.
- * **Focus curriculum on earth-friendly themes.** Special activities such as library, music, and motor classes are perfect opportunities.
- * **Get parents on board.** Send a letter to parents explaining sustainable practice policies, such as reusing office paper that has been printed on one side for coloring, "trash-free lunches," etc.

Be Energy-Wise!

- * **Make use of natural light.**
- * **Turn off lights when not in use.**
- * **Encourage carpooling.** At the beginning of the year put up a large map. Put pins where families live to help families find others living close by (county planning departments usually have good maps).
- * **Change your thermostat settings.** Setting thermostats 2 degrees higher in summer and 2 degrees lower in winter can have a major impact on the amount of energy you use. Install ceiling fans to help circulate the air.

Let's Have an Eco-Lunch!

- * **Encourage "Trash-Free Lunches."** Encourage families to send reusable containers in school lunches if lunches/snacks are sent from home. Children will need to learn how to open and close reusable containers and pack and unpack reusable containers in lunch/snack bag. Advocate for parents to buy in bulk rather than individually wrapped packaging. Start slowly to get parents on board, perhaps just one day a week. Give stamps on the hands of children bringing a lunch or snack that is 100% trash free.
- * **Incorporate composting and/or worm farms into meal times.** Scraping the plates into a small bucket with a trip to the compost pile can be built into each day and into the "helper of the day" task chart. These tasks could be expanded to include the regular excursion to the kitchen to gather the appropriate kitchen scraps and take them to the compost. Children can also collect grass clippings and leaves in season and learn to include them. This is also an opportunity to involve families. Parents or grandparents could come and turn the pile with the kids watching and helping. Several resources for composting are located at www.p2pays.org/compost/composting101.asp. Worm farm information can be found at www.css.cornell.edu/compost/worms/basics.html.

Time to Clean Up!

- * **Purchase environmentally friendly cleaning products.** Check out the *Green Clean Schools* web site for ideas at:
http://healthyschoolscampaign.org/campaign/green_clean_schools/.
- * **Create your own cleaning products.** Involve children in the use of the “old fashioned” cleaning products like vinegar, baking soda and lemon. There could be an ongoing exploration and discussion of the inclusion of these items in more expensive products, such as a “lemon scent.” Allow the children to use a variety of different products to do some of their own sample cleaning. Washing a window with Windex and a paper towel or with vinegar and newspaper is a great comparison example.

It's Not All Trash! Reduce, Reuse Recycle

- * **Recycling is fun!** Turn it into a sorting activity or a relay race and make it a great habit!
- * **Make your own play dough using water & flour and a little oil.** The mixing up and adding food coloring is just as fun as rolling and cutting. Children can compost the mixture at the end of the session.
- * **Reuse old clothes.** Conduct a clothing exchange with staff and/or parent volunteers. This is a great way to make a box of dress up clothes from old party shawls, furs, velvet vests, etc. Use strips of cloth from old t-shirts to decorate fences and as art material. There is a great deal of tactile variation in fabric.
- * **Engage children in sorting items into proper recycling or reuse receptacles.** Children can sort things from their lunches, art project etc. into bins that are well-located in the classroom space. Bins can be labeled composting, paper recycling, plastic recycling, things for reusing and last and hopefully least, trash. Youngsters, even younger than 3, are very competent with this kind of sorting if it is modeled and featured in a ready-to-use spot.
- * **Model reusing materials in art and other projects.** Incorporate discarded junk/treasure items in crafts projects rather than purchasing new art materials.
- * **Engage families in the center's recycling efforts.** Designate one of the rotating volunteer jobs for families to collect and take the school's recycling to the recycling center. Encourage parents to do that job with their child.
- * **Ask parents to support paper conservation.** Ask them to donate paper from the work place that is just printed on one side for use in school for art and writing activities.
- * **Use paper on both sides before recycling.**
- * **Send home less “products” that children have created.** Instead, save block building or doll play for parents to see or document children's creations through photographs. Conduct community projects where all children work together on a single product (e.g. paper maché around cardboard tubes to make dinosaur bones).

Play Naturally!

- * **Use found natural objects for crafts and play.** Use small sticks collected in the outdoor learning environment instead of craft sticks for stirring, pasting, and art projects.
- * **Create an earth friendly bulletin board.** Use real leaves for fall bulletin boards instead of construction paper cut outs, etc.
- * **Use natural toys.** These can be building blocks cut from tree limbs, smooth river rocks, or even toys with proven long shelf life such as Brio®, Lincoln Logs, and Tinkertoys.

- * **Create “Ephemeral Art.”** Gather natural objects from the outdoors, (sticks, pine cones, leaves, stones, seedpods, etc.) and make an arrangement on the sidewalk or on the level surface of a tree stump. Help the children admire each other's work and then put the objects back where you found them!
- * **Use natural objects to share personal stories.** Encourage children to bring natural objects from a personal family trip/adventure for sharing time. For example, a child might bring in a pine cone from a grandparent's yard or stones from the creek at an aunt's house. These can then be contributed to a designated outdoor play space for use by all the children.

Digging in the Garden!

- * **Use non-invasive, native plants when planting garden areas for birds and butterflies.** Observing their production of flower and fruit involves teachers and children directly in the cycle of the seasons, and more importantly, their presence at the center is a commitment to sustain the native birds and critters who sustain us. For example, planting a native honeysuckle like Coral honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*) on the arbor instead of its non-native, invasive cousin Japanese honeysuckle means that hummingbirds have nectar when they need it in the early spring. Visitors such as birds and butterflies enliven the outdoors and can be watched for, studied, and loved. Planting and nurturing native plants involves children and families in the act of stewardship, teaching them that they can care for birds and insects in a very direct way.
- * **Plant vegetable gardens.** Children can plant from seed and take care of their plants until harvest time. Use harvested vegetables to provide occasional snacks for children.

Take a Closer Look! Experience the Natural World

- * **Include a moon and/or sun calendar in the daily calendar.** This is one way to begin making the solar system connection. Watch for the moon and talk about it during early fall and winter evenings. Read stories about the moon. Have children watch for the moonlight at night at home and share stories about it during circle time. Begin to learn to honor the sun and how vital it is to all living things. Take note of where the sun is in the sky during the day. Mark shadows of children and fixed objects on the playground (climbers, trees, shrubs) at different times of the day. Watch how those shadows grow and shrink. If there is a south facing window, mark those shadows and position of the sun for different seasons inside the room.
- * **There's not bad weather, just bad clothing.** Go outside and experience rain or snow. Have slickers and rain boots on hand, ready for use at any time.
- * **Be a friend to wildlife.** Create wildlife habitats around your school. Put out nesting materials for birds such as hair and dryer lint. Put out bluebird nest boxes if you have lots of open space. Put up bird feeders to attract different species of birds. Build bird blinds for viewing birds without scaring them away. Visit the National Wildlife Federation for more ideas and information: www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife/.

Be Water Wise!

- * **Turn off water when brushing teeth or while soaping up hands.**
- * **Plant drought tolerant native plants.** These plants need less water once established and are often suitable for habitats and animals. Visit the NC Botanical Garden web site for a good list of drought tolerant native plants at <http://ncbg.unc.edu/pages/96/>.
- * **Harvest rainwater with rain barrels or cisterns.** Use this water to take care of plants in vegetable gardens and wildlife habitat gardens.